

## **Chapter 8**

### ***Upgrading People: Customer Service Training***

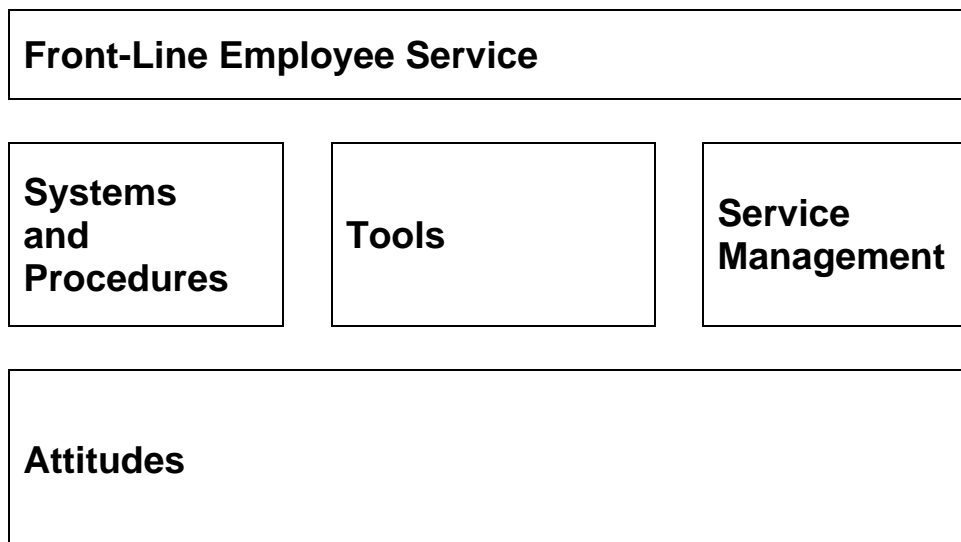
The previous chapters have dealt primarily with changing systems using standard process redesign techniques. However, other opportunities exist for improving the interaction between government and the investor. This chapter discusses training front line employees on the provision of customer service. Chapter 9 introduces the concepts of electronic methods, including the use of faxes and the Internet with the investor – government transaction.

A fundamental basis for process redesign is that the flaws exist in the system, not in the people. Often, processes are redesigned to minimize the variability that the human interaction can cause. If everything is systematized, written down, and clear, nothing should go wrong – so says the theory.

In many cases this is accurate. However, it is somewhat inevitable that the government-investor transaction will result in some sort of human interaction. Many government employees are woefully under-trained in the most basic of customer service skills. Even a simplistic process can be undermined by an apathetic or worse, disgruntled employee. To address this weakness, customer service training has been used as a valuable component of a government's upgrading of its Roadmap.

#### **A Model of Customer Service**

The fundamental premise of Customer Focused Governance is that Governments must move from being regulators to being service providers. This implies that removal of the barriers to investment is not enough – it merely represents a first step. An organization wishing to serve customers must consider the following five components:



The top layer of the framework is **Frontline Employee Service**. This represents the service provided directly by the employees with whom a customer must interact. Many front-line employees in developing countries' governments are neglected when it comes to customer service training. The most basic skills including telephone etiquette, preparation, and personal interactions are seriously deficient in many government agencies.

An employee who is well trained and conscientious can often have a positive impact on a system that doesn't work. Investors will make mention of departments with convoluted procedures but helpful employees.

The employee's ability to provide high quality customer service is supported by three components – **Systems and Procedures, Tools, and Service Management**. A well-trained, well-intentioned frontline employee cannot effectively provide good service without these three components. Even if the employee listens carefully, takes notes, follows up, and takes extraordinary measures to help the investor, if the process takes 6 months or the phones don't work, or the management doesn't provide support efforts are wasted.

**Systems and Procedures** are the primary focus of the Investor Roadmap. This component refers to the manner in which documents must be processed.

**Tools** refer to many aspects of the physical environment surrounding the employee. These tools range from the physical layout and location of the offices (easily accessed by an investor? Do the elevators work? Are offices large enough to accommodate a queue? Is parking available?) to the more obvious tools of the trade (telephones, computers) to descriptive literature and easily understood forms and applications. Many of these tools are also addressed by the Investor Roadmap.

**Service Management** refers to the management's approach to providing service. How many hours are the offices open? Are they open on Saturdays? Are there enough people on hand to help customers? Many of these concepts are also addressed by the Roadmap. However, some questions are not. How do you train new employees to provide customer service. What is the manager's role and when must the manager be involved in an interaction. How does management reward good or punish poor service?

*"There was clearly a correlation between the agency or organization's focus on customer service and the impact the course had on the participants. Customs, Mines, and NNCCI have introduced customer service throughout the organization, and participants' efforts to take measures were clearly supported."*

*Interestingly, participants stated that Immigration have introduced the provision of service as a prerequisite of promotion, thereby making it the only agency that has a formalized system of reward for the provision of customer service. However, it is clear that supervisors are not well trained in customer service skills, therefore there is little support for the front-line employees wishing to provide good service."*

- End-of-Trip Memorandum, Namibia

A foundation that underlies the whole model is **Attitudes**. In the absence of proper attitudes, it is unlikely that training will be effective, management will be effective, tools will be available or properly utilized or that systems will function. Usual outcomes of poor attitudes are high turnover, corruption, misused, damaged, and sometimes stolen equipment, and, of course, poor customer service.

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While the model suggests a structural order, the implementation is much more fluid and circular. Positive attitudes often lead to new systems designed by employees and managers alike. Tools are often utilized in new and improved ways. Improved management recognizes the value of empowering employees and gives them the ability to be more effective. And finally, the improved systems, tools, and management creates a climate that is conducive to increased positive attitudes.

While the process is self-fulfilling and cyclical, it often needs inputs to act as catalysts. As this book has described in great detail, The Investor Roadmap has proven to be an effective catalyst. Customer Service training is also an important input into this process, for both management and frontline employees alike.

### **Frontline Employee Training**

Typically, frontline employee customer service training is extremely rudimentary. It is often neglected by governments for several reasons, the most important of which is the sheer cost of training the large number of employees.

A two-day course has been designed by TSG to deliver the most basic skills. The course covers four components including:

**Basic Interactions** – The course has broken these interactions into a five step process – being prepared, greeting a customer, listening to a customer, acting to help the customer, and closing out and following up. In this module, there is a focus on making the service provider into a customer – that is to remind the employee that they also shop for goods, and are equally subject to good and bad service.

*“We do all of these things, everyday. There is nothing here that is brand new to us. However, we never actually think about these things. Do I think at the beginning of the day ‘am I ready?’ – no I don’t. Do I think to ask someone whether there is anything else I can do? No.”*

- Class Participant, Namibian Customs

**Telephone Etiquette** – This module adapts the Basic Interactions to the telephone. Basic topics such as taking a proper message, calling someone else to the phone, putting a caller on hold, and answering the phone properly are discussed.

*“When I first saw this outline, I said to myself ‘what do these people think they can teach me about answering the phone? I’ve been answering the phone for 10 years.’ But I did learn some things. I have new ideas and there are things I want to try out.”*

- Class Participant, Tanzania Lands Office

**Dealing With Difficult Customers and Special Situations** – This is the session that most participants look forward to. Almost all government employees find themselves in confrontational situations and are rarely trained on how to cope. Special techniques and tips are presented here.

**Providing Team Service** – This is possibly the most difficult session yet possibly yields the greatest results. The fundamentals of “process” are introduced here in order to help students understand that they are part of a larger system. Conflicts with fellow employees are addressed here.

The object of this chapter is not to discuss the ins and outs of training people in the provision of quality customer service. There are many other texts that can do a significantly better job of detailing the training. However, there are some key points that arise that differentiate the civil servant of an emerging economy from the typical corporate service provider.

*Government employees are often constrained by inadequate facilities including poor offices, inadequate computer technology and archaic phone systems. Most of the expectations of typical “customers” cannot be met if telephones have no capabilities to hold or transfer calls*

- End-of-Trip Memorandum, Namibia

Many employees have been around for a number of years, including times when economies were closed to foreign investment, and local investment was discouraged. Government employees came to learn that their role was stay out of trouble – trouble arising when an approval is given before all documentation has reached a usually unachievable state of perfection.

Many of these employees have not yet learned the value of the foreign direct investor. If they can conceive of the importance, they do not understand their role in facilitating the investment. Even if they understand the importance and their role, the wealth of the investor, usually hundreds of times greater than the civil servant, creates envy that leads to dysfunctional behavior.

Therefore, the course discusses at great length the impact of providing customer service on the *provider*. Concepts such as job satisfaction, promotions, and other benefits are discussed. Employees are asked to consider times when they were customers. Often times, it seems conceivable that governments deliberately choose the most apathetic and abusive individuals it can find. Obviously, this is not the case, but many employees lack even the most basic motivation to improve their delivery of service.

*Interviews with the participants themselves indicated a willingness to apply the lessons learned, however, faced with a non-supportive environment, they abandoned their efforts early on. Participants suggested that management was unaware of the importance of customer service and was unwilling to recognize the efforts of the participants. More importantly, key employees who had been in*

*their positions for many years were particularly disdainful of the value of the training course and had a negative influence on the participants.*

- End-of-Trip Memorandum, Namibia

The responsibility of motivation largely falls on those charged with Service Management. Many higher level government employees are given the opportunity to attend such course. In Namibia, the Office of the Prime Minister has designed a course to develop managers' skills in customer service.

The basic outline for a training course for managers should include:

- An understanding of the skills taught in a frontline employee training course
- The role of the manager in a service interaction
- Setting service goals
- Managing customer service employees
  - Training
  - Measuring progress
  - Reinforcement
- Managing processes
- Managing customer service resources

### **Course Delivery**

As noted earlier, the costs of training an entire civil service can be extremely high. This is particularly the case when foreign consultants are requested to conduct the training. As a result, the model that has been effective in disseminating training to a large audience suggests that consultants' time is most effectively utilized in a three step approach:

- 1) Incorporate customer service training into the civil service code as a condition of service;
- 2) Adapting the training course to fit local conditions
- 3) Train government trainers in its delivery

This approach was used in Namibia as a component of the Investor Roadmap. A class was assembled with a combination of civil servants, government trainers, and officers from the Office of the Prime Minister. The role of the civil servants was to be subject of the experimental material. Their input was regularly sought throughout the 2 day process to ensure that the course material was appropriate for Namibia.

The trainers participated both as trainers and as students. Off days in between class days were used to raise the skill level of the trainers and introduce the materials to them. They too play an important role in the shaping of the course to fit the needs of Namibia.

As a result, the Office of the Prime Minister has begun to introduce the course to Namibian civil servants. The OPM's training department is relatively new, and does not yet represent each ministry throughout the government. However, an important target of the Roadmap, the Department of Customs has introduced the course into its regular rotation of training exercises. Other departments have followed.

